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PRRC emerging trends

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BASIC RELIGIOUS TRENDS REMAIN UNCHANGED IN SURVEYS IN 1985

PRINCETON, N.J. — Despite the new interest of Americans in religion and the spiritual life — evidenced by book sales, the popularity of college courses on religion, and a growth in Bible study and prayer groups — little change has occurred in recent years in the importance people place on religion in their lives, in their perceptions of the impact of religion on society, and in church membership and attendance.

- The latest survey of Gallup surveys on the importance of religion, based on interviews with 2,691 adults in 1985, shows 58% saying religion is very important in their lives, statistically the same as in the previous studies conducted since 1958.

- Little change has occurred in Americans' perceptions of the impact of religion on society.

  The 1985 surveys found 58% believing that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, similar to the findings of the earlier surveys since 1974.

  In a recent Gallup survey 45% said religion is increasing its influence, 20% decreasing, and 31% staying the same. While not statistically significant, these results are the most positive of the last two years.

- Finally, annual Gallup Poll audits have found little recent change in the proportions who say they are church members and who attend church weekly. In the 1985 audits, 71% report being members and 42% attended church in a typical week.

BUT FAR LOWER LEVELS THAN IN THE 1950s

Although these basic religious indicators have shown little change in recent years, the current findings are considerably less favorable to organized religion than those recorded in the 1950s (and in some cases, the early and mid-1960s).

Following is the question on the importance of religion and the trend:

"How important would you say religion is in your life — very important, fairly important, or not very important?"

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION

	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %
1985	58	31	13
1984	59	30	13
1983	58	30	13
1982	58	30	13
1981	58	29	14
1980	56	31	13
1978	52	32	14
1965	70	22	7
1952	75	20	5

Here is the question used to measure the public's views on the influence of religion and the trend:

"Do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, or that it is out of date and can't help that much?"

CAN RELIGION ANSWER PROBLEMS?

	Can answer %	Out of date %	No opinion %
1985–Nov	58	24	18
–Mar	61	22	17
1984	56	21	23
1982	60	22	18
1981	65	15	20
1974	62	20	18
1957	81	7	12

Following is the question asked to determine perceptions of the influence of religion on society and the trend:

At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?

Following is the trend with the proportion saying the same or "no opinion" excluded:

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON AMERICAN LIFE

	Increasing %	Losing %
1985–Nov.	55	41
–March	58	39
1984	52	39
1983	54	42
1981	58	40
1980	53	46
1978	57	38
1977	56	43
1976	52	45
1975	39	57
1974	37	59
1970	54	76
1969	54	75
1968	38	62
1967	23	67
1965	33	45
1962	45	37
1957	69	24

Four adults in every 10 (42%) attended church or synagogue in a typical week in 1985. Churchgoing has remained remarkably constant since 1960 after having declined from the high point of 49% recorded in 1955 and 1958.

The proportion of adult church members has also changed little in recent years, with 71% now claiming membership in a church or synagogue. The highest level of membership (76%) was found in 1947, close to the 73% recorded in the first Gallup audit in 1937.

The figures on the importance of religion are based on in-person interviews with 7,649 adults 18 and older, interviewed during five selected weeks in 1985. The attendance and membership figures are based on in-person interviews with 5,093 adults conducted in four selected weeks during 1985. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 2 percentage points in either direction.

Interviews were conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation.

The two questions on the impact of religion were asked in a survey of 1,008 adults interviewed by telephone during the period Nov. 11–18. Sampling error for samples of this size could be 4 percentage points in either direction.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS, MOST LIKELY TO SAY RELIGION "IMPORTANT"

Southern Baptists and Mormons are the most likely to say religion is "very important" in their lives, as determined by recent Gallup surveys.

Three-quarters (74%) Southern Baptists give this response, comparable to the percentage of Mormons (71%) who do so.

In the next tier are Lutherans (55%) say religion is very important in their lives), Catholics (54%), and Methodists (53%).

Next among persons of the major denominations are the Presbyterians (46% say very important) and the Episcopalians (42%).

The national findings, based on interviews with 7,649 adults in 1985, are "very important" — 55%, "fairly important" — 31%, "not very important" — 13%.

Here are the results with "no opinion" excluded:

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION

	Very Imp. %	Fairly Imp. %	Not very Imp. %
So. Baptists	74	21	4
Mormons	71	24	5
Lutherans	55	35	9
Catholics	54	35	10
Methodists	53	37	10
Presbyterians	46	43	11
Episcopalians	42	45	12

Teens Feel Religion Is Losing Its Influence on Life in U.S.

The majority of teenagers today feel that religion is losing its influence on American life, according to a 1985 Gallup Youth Survey.

Teens are not as likely as adults to believe in God, and are even more likely to attend church in a typical week, by a margin of 53% to 40%. But while a plurality of adults (45%) view religion as gaining in importance in America's society, a majority of teens (55%) say it is losing its importance. Two in three adults (64%) say they have a "good deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in organized religion, but comparatively fewer teens (52%) share this view.

Only four in 10 teens (40%) believe religion is increasing its influence on American life. Even among those who attend religious services regularly, more say religion is losing (49%) than gaining (46%) in its influence on our society. Among non-regular church attenders, six in 10 (61%) see a decline in religion's influence on America.

A slim majority of teens (52%) express confidence in organized religion, but 48% show little confidence in the church. Among those attending church regularly, confidence in organized religion is expressed by three teens in four (74%). Lack of confidence in organized religion may be a key determinant to such regular church attendance, with 68% of those not attending saying that, at best, they have only "some" confidence in organized religion.

Protestant teens (58%) are more likely than Catholics (52%) to say they have high confidence in organized religion. Showing a lack of confidence in the church are 48% of Catholic and 41% of Protestant youth. The same proportion (56%) of both Catholic and Protestant teens, however, view religion as losing influence on American life.

Southern teens show high confidence in organized religion (65%) and are more likely (44%) than those in other regions to believe religion is increasing its influence on American society. Half of the teens living in the Midwest also express high confidence in the church, and 40% see an increase in its influence.

Hardest to find confidence is shown in religion, with low marks being given by teens in the West (56%) and East (65%). Correspondingly, about six in 10 teens from the East (62%) and West (59%) perceive the church's loss of influence.

Here are the questions asked:

Do you feel religion in this country as a whole is increasing its influence or decreasing in losing its influence?

How much confidence do you have in the church or church-related issues—a great deal, quite a lot, some, very little or none?

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross-section of 502 teenagers, ages 13 through 18, conducted from August through October 1985.

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON U.S LIFE (Views of Teens)

	Increasing	Decreasing
NATIONAL	40%	55%
Male	37	58
Female	42	52
Ages 13 to 15	40	54
Ages 16 to 18	38	57
Protestant	39	56
Catholic	41	56
Attend church regularly	46	49
Don't attend regularly	33	61
East	34	62
Midwest	40	52
South	44	50
West	39	59
Adults	48	39

Note: "Same" "No opinion" omitted

Nearly All Teens Believe in God or a Universal Spirit

The vast majority of American teenagers express belief in God or a universal spirit, according to the results of a 1985 Gallup Youth Survey.

Great majorities also say that they believe in a personal God who watches over and rules people, and believe that there is life after death.

Belief in God or a universal spirit is expressed by 96% of the teens. Only 3% say they do not believe, and 1% express uncertainty about their beliefs. Among those who attend church regularly, 99% profess belief in God.

Belief in God among teenagers has remained steady since 1967 when 95% said they believe in God or a universal spirit. These findings punish the notion that has held that the overall U.S. population has become less religious in recent years, although the survey did find that the belief in God throughout the same period.

For many teens, however, their belief in God is not very abstract. Beyond belief in a personal God is the question of their actions and rewards or penalties they may receive. Such is found among comparatively fewer teens. Three-fourths of teens (75%) believe in a personal God. Not everyone who believes in a personal God says they are sure of their beliefs. Among those who say they believe in a personal God, 69% say they are not sure if one exists.

By comparison, fewer adults (61% based on a previous survey) believe in a personal God. Belief in a personal God is highest among those who attend church regularly (87%). Among those who do not attend religious services regularly, a majority (62%) still professes belief in a personal God. But among those who do not attend services regularly, 29% say they do not believe in a personal God, and 7% express uncertainty about a personal God's existence.

Twenty-three teens (6%) believe there is life after death. Among the remaining teens, 28% do not believe, and 5% are uncertain about the matter. Such belief in an eternal life has been strong. 84% when only 5% of teens believed in a life after death. Teen belief in life after death, however, is still slightly lower than that of the adult population where 71% believe there may be an eternal existence.

Interestingly, young men are more likely than young women to believe in a life after death, by a margin of 71% to 66%. Among those who attend church regularly, 71% believe in the after death, compared to only 62% of those who are not regular churchgoers.

Catholic and Protestant teenagers hold very similar views on these basic spiritual beliefs, and no significant differences are noted according to denominational affiliation or preference.

Teenagers' beliefs were determined through the following questions:

Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?

Do you believe that the God or universal spirit observes your actions and rewards or punishes you for them?

Do you believe in life after death, or not?

Here are the results:

BELIEF IN GOD
(Views of Teens)

	Yes	No, not sure
	%	%
NATIONAL	96	4
Males	95	5
Female	96	4
Ages 13 to 15	97	3
Ages 16 to 18	94	6
Protestant	98	2
Catholic	99	1
Attend church regularly	99	1
Don't attend regularly	92	8

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 502 teenagers, 13 through 18, conducted from August through October 1985.

GROWTH NOTED IN BIBLE STUDY, PRAYER GROUPS

The percentages of American adults involved in Bible study groups and in prayer groups has shown a slight upturn in recent years.

On the other hand, little statistical change over the period of time has come ahead in a number of other practices or movements, including the charismatic renewal, speaking in tongues and healing.

Following are the questions asked and the results (the 1985 and 1983 results are based on surveys conducted by The Gallup Organization for The Christian Broadcasting Network):

Which, if any, of these do you personally do or take part in?

INVOLVEMENT IN PRACTICES OR MOVEMENTS
(Adults, 18 and older)

Bible Study Groups

1985	26%
1983	20
1981	19
1979	20
1978	19

Prayer or Meditation Groups

1985	19
1983	17
1981	14

Religious Education Classes

1985	21%
1983	18

Charismatic Renewal

1985	5
*1983	4
1981	4
1979	5
1978	3
1976	5

Speaking in Tongues

1985	3%
1983	4
1981	4
1979	4
1978	3

Healing

1985	6%
1983	5
1979	7
1978	6

Prophecy

1985	4%
1983	4
1978	3

Witnessing

1985	14%
1983	13

Evangelism

1985	9%
1983	9

Missionary work

1985	10%
1983	8

Eastern Religions

1979	1%
1978	1
1976	1

TM (Transcendental Meditation)

1979	4%
1978	2
1976	4

Yoga

1979	3%
1978	3
1976	3

Unification Church ("Moonies")

1978	1%

Marriage Encounter

1978	3%

Mysticism

1976	2%

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"However much we teach, we sincerely believe you will find FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY to be an invaluable help in your work.

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